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ABSTRACT

Of all challenges facing open-door community colleges, none is more important than the need to renew and improve teaching quality in order to accommodate increasingly diversified student populations. Several policies have been particularly helpful to open-door institutions in improving student retention and achievement, including the following: (1) proactive pre-enrollment that includes personal contact with a faculty or administration member; (2) freshman orientation, during which a student/peer or faculty/peer relationship is established; (3) academic/personal assessment of entering freshmen; (4) reduced academic hours for working students; (5) elimination of late registration; (6) assigned faculty mentors for students; (7) more problem-solving activities in all courses; and (8) the replacement of retiring community college staff and faculty with higher quality candidates. All teaching candidates should be required to demonstrate their teaching abilities in real or simulated learning situations before any hiring decision is made. The creation of faculty and staff orientation programs is also recommended to educate new individuals about the institutional mission and values of an open-door community college. (WJT)

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Assessment Digest

1989-90/1

LEADERSHIP FOR 2000

by

John E. Roueche

Sid W. Richardson Regents Chair
in Community College Leadership

The University of Texas at Austin

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Professional

Association of Community College Administrators

LEADERSHIP FOR 2000

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Of all the challenges and opportunities facing community colleges during the decade of the 1990s, none is of more importance than the need to renew and improve teaching quality as community colleges seek to accommodate more and more diverse student populations.

The American community college has long borne the brunt and responsibility of serving underprepared students in American higher education. With its open-door policy of admissions that accepts any high school graduate or any adult who can profit from instruction, our colleges have decades of experience in providing developmental or remedial courses to entering students who do not possess the basic literacy skills needed for academic success in regular freshman curricula. By the late 1960s the most-offered courses in American community colleges were remedial writing, remedial reading, and remedial arithmetic. As much as 50 percent of any entering freshman class was found in need of essential remedial work (Roueche, 1968).

The problem of the remedial student has not been solved in the past two decades, and I doubt very much that any community college can look forward to a future of literate entering freshmen. The evidence to date indicates

that community college students are enrolling with more academic and personal problems than ever before--problems that pose tremendous challenges for faculty and staff in the history of our institution. American students now leave high school with even poorer academic skills than was true a decade or two ago. Couple this poor academic preparation with the dramatic increase of minorities and foreign-born students and one gets a picture of the challenge and dilemma ahead.

Community college leaders in the 90s, as they prepare for 2000, must get more and more serious about the need to build and implement academic policies consistent with the needs of students who enroll in open-door institutions. We need academic policies that will promote success for our students, including both retention and achievement.

I shall identify here a number of such policies that have been documented to promote student success in open-door institutions.

Proactive Pre-Enrollment

More than a decade ago, Jefferson Community College (Kentucky) developed a Recruitment, Retention, and Attrition (RRA) Project to attack an institution-wide problem, namely the need to personalize relationships with prospective students who expressed interest in JCC. Today, when students write or call Jefferson Community College, not only are they notified promptly about their admission, they receive a letter of welcome and greeting from the division chairperson of the student's intended major, as well as a letter from the student's academic department. This expanded system of personalizing communication with students creates a feeling of "welcome" and personalized attention to individual student needs. Evaluation from students indicate that the additional attention they receive from Jefferson Community College increased their commitment to completing enrollment and to spending quality

time in the college environment.

The concern for the student who demonstrates interest in JCC by seeking admission has been expanded to embrace the entire community of potentially interested learners. For example, the classified staff at Jefferson recently focused an entire staff development day on their efforts to improve student advising, by providing even more accurate and proper information when students call, by directing troubled or confused students to appropriate personnel, and by personally referring students in an effort to more humanize and personalize the experience. Data from Jefferson Community College indicate that student retention has been positively affected by the proactive pre-enrollment efforts.

Orientation

It has long concerned me that the most selective universities in our country provide both more structure and support for entering students than do our open-access institutions. For example, the University of Notre Dame retains over 95 percent of its entering freshmen to baccalaureate attainment. Community college leaders might say, "Well, why shouldn't Notre Dame do that well, given the quality of the freshmen they attract?" A fair question, for sure! However, Notre Dame provides all kinds of structure and support to entering freshmen to make sure that freshmen matriculate at Notre Dame.

Almost all major universities require orientation of entering freshmen. Remember that their freshmen are bright and talented individuals with years of academic success and achievement, as well as achievement outside of classrooms. The universities require orientation in an effort to socialize, inculturate, and to embed the values held dear by the university culture. Community college students, by contrast, have less reason to anticipate success and, therefore, need more orientation than any other group of learners in American

higher education.

By orientation, I don't mean a one-day experience where all entering freshmen are greeted by all college officials and given bits and pieces of information relative to college life. Beal and Noel (1980) found years ago that college orientation programs can improve freshmen retention by more than 20 percent--if the orientation experience provides quality time for interaction between an entering freshman and a mentor who has been assigned to the student. First, and ideally, the mentor should be a faculty member who teaches in the student's proposed field of specialization. If an entering freshman leaves orientation, having spent quality time with the faculty member and feeling honestly welcomed and valued, his chance of enrolling and persisting increases dramatically. Second, Beal and Noel found that similar improvements in student persistence would occur if an orientation program facilitated the establishment of a student/peer relationship, preferably with a second-year or upper-division student.

Good orientation programs produce powerful and positive results and should be in place in every community college. I would recommend further that entry-level orientation programs be followed by formal orientation courses throughout the freshman year. Here again, almost all universities offer courses during the freshman year to further inculturate and socialize students. These courses are sometimes called "college survival courses," "college success courses," or "the freshman-year experience." Community college students need the reinforcement provided by these courses, namely more attention to motivation, to time management, to good study skills, and to good planning. The combination of intake orientation coupled with a yearlong one- or two-hour orientation course will pay tremendous dividends in the decade ahead.

Academic-Personal Assessment

In a recent national study of American colleges and universities, George Baker, Suanne Roueche, and I (1984) discovered that the large majority of American colleges and universities were strongly in favor of mandatory assessment of all freshmen. Only recently, however, have we discovered evidence of strong support for mandatory placement to follow such assessment.

Those institutions that practice "tough" testing and placement policies have seen dramatic improvement in student persistence and achievement. It is important here to emphasize that I am not recommending anything resembling the "closing" of the open door! To the contrary, I am suggesting that students be assessed at entry to make certain they have the skills and the necessary prerequisites to have a reasonable chance of success in our classes. If students are deficient in academic skills, if they are working too many hours, if they don't have support for college attendance, then they should be properly advised and placed in courses and programs with services to make certain they are not placed into any curriculum where they have no chance of being successful.

Again, American universities never gave up on the idea of assessing and placing entering freshmen. They still do it, and the policy helps to explain the greater success they enjoy with their entering freshmen. Community college leaders must get serious about the implementation of this academic policy if they hope to improve the quality of instruction.

Reduced Hours for Working Students

When I was a dean of students in a new community college, more than 20 years ago, we had a mandated reduced-hour policy for any "working" student. This need is even more critical in the 90s and as we look toward the

year 2000. More and more of our students are going to be working full-time, and others will be increasing their part-time work loads as well. I would recommend that colleges implement policies which limit students who are working 30 hours a week or more to no more than six academic hours (two courses) in any academic semester. A student working 20 hours a week would be permitted to enroll in no more than nine academic hours (three courses) in a given semester. This policy will keep students from "biting off more than they can chew" and help them build realistic plans to accomplish their educational goals.

It has been more than two decades since the average community college graduate finished a program of study in two years. Even university students do not graduate in four years. We need to be realistic regarding the ages and commitments of our students and redesign curricular to accommodate the reality of the circumstances that led them to community colleges in the first place.

Ending Late Registration

In my work with community college faculty members, I find that all of them realize that the first week of any academic term is the most critical and important week for getting students positively involved in the life of a course, getting those students off to a good beginning, and--hopefully--building enthusiasm in the process. These same faculty also know that the first day of the first week is the most important time in the life of any course.

I can think of no academic policy more counterproductive to student success in an open-access situation than a policy which permits (and perhaps

encourages) students to begin their studies a week or two late. Most colleges have found that students who enroll late normally drop out or fail during the first semester of their enrollment. A notable exception to this finding is the important work being done at Jefferson Community College. At Jefferson, if a student seeks to enroll in a class after the commencement of the academic term, they may do so with only the explicit permission of the classroom instructor. In giving the student permission, however, the instructor also commits to be available on a personal basis to assist the student in overcoming the material that has been missed to date. At Jefferson, students who enroll late do well because faculty and staff pledge themselves to provide the needed support and assistance for this outcome.

Mentoring for Students

Community college students need excellent faculty mentors. This is extremely important given that most of our students are first-generation college attenders and know little about succeeding in college environments. To many of our minority students, the community college represents an environment almost as alien as any they could possibly envision. We need to have faculty involved with students personally and professionally in serving as role models and in providing both personal and professional advice to students relative to success in the various programs that we offer.

In our Department at The University of Texas, every entering student is assigned to a faculty mentor. The professor mentor is a volunteer who has great knowledge and expertise in the student's chosen field of study. Students and faculty spend time before orientation getting acquainted and building a relationship that is envisioned to be a lasting one. The irony here is that community college students are much more in need of faculty mentors

than students enrolling in American universities and graduate schools. This policy will result in better student success and offers great promise in community college settings.

More Problem-Solving Activities in All Courses

In my work with community colleges over the past 20 years, I have observed, sadly, the same level of teaching and evaluation so very common in American high schools. I am talking about the absence of writing and the absence of quality evaluation procedures in community college courses. Over the past five years, I have collected hundreds of final examinations from community college courses all over the country and have discovered that 80 to 90 percent of these are of the "objective" variety.

When one examines the results of "writing in all courses," we can obviously see the qualitative improvement of student success as measured by better retention and, more importantly, by improved outcome measures. I refer here to the CLAST results in Florida community colleges. It is imperative that academic leadership in community colleges work hand-in-hand with faculty members to raise standards and to make sure that students are engaged in quality cognitive activities--if our graduates are to be perceived and valued as we would wish them to be.

Replacing Staff and Faculty

If these issues were not enough for community colleges as we begin the 1990s, consider further that the average American community college must replace 40 to 60 percent of its faculty, support staff, and administrative leadership team in the decade ahead. The task in this reality is that we

must replace retiring faculty and staff members with better quality than is reflected in those departing. This challenge is one that will pose great difficulty for community colleges in the years ahead, because graduate schools are no longer offering programs of preparation for talented and committed individuals to pursue college teaching as a career option.

I am excited, however, at the pioneering efforts of a number of American community colleges as they seek to better identify faculty and staff members who truly believe in the mission of the open-door college. Miami-Dade Community College (Florida) and St. Petersburg Junior College (Florida) have each invested more than a year in charting a course of action for the future that will enable them to hire faculty and staff more representative of the student bodies they serve, and as important, to hire faculty members whose personal and professional values are more congruent with the values and the mission of the community college. Similarly, the Los Angeles Community College District (California) has experienced great success to date in their quest to hire faculty members who reflect both the ethnicity and gender composition of students served in the District. Los Angeles Chancellor Phelps indicates that better faculty and staff diversity has been accomplished without sacrificing quality in the least!

Academic leaders need to develop more skill in their abilities to discern quality candidates from the others. For example, in several of our recent studies, George Baker and I have found virtually no relationship between academic credentials possessed by a candidate and the ability of that individual to motivate and inspire students in community college settings. In our current study, Teaching as Leading, Baker, Gillett-Karam, and I (1990) found that exceptional community college faculty members perceive the most important aspect of their teaching job to be that of motivating and inspiring

students. We need to look for candidates who "want to teach," indeed, "who want to make a difference" in the lives of students, and are truly excited about the challenge and opportunity afforded by teaching in an open-door college.

I would strongly suggest a hiring practice of requiring all teaching candidates to demonstrate their teaching abilities in real or simulated learning situations before any hiring decision is made. In our Department at The University of Texas, we require all candidates--part-time and full-time--to demonstrate teaching ability in a three-hour session before any recommendation is made for hiring. This recommendation will save community colleges much grief and agony--they will find, early on, that most candidates simply cannot keep a class of students involved in powerful ways for the requisite three-hour period.

I also recommend that community colleges build orientation programs for all new faculty and staff to acquaint and educate them around the norms and values of community colleges. A number of community colleges are now requiring a week or more of orientation and training before faculty and staff begin work. This is an excellent practice and will pay tremendous dividends for the college and its students.

A strong model has been developed at Miami-Dade Community College, where all new faculty and staff members must complete two graduate courses offered for credit by the University of Miami. These courses are taught in conjunction with Miami-Dade Community College, and the curriculum has been collaboratively developed. Completion of these two courses is a condition of employment and an effort by the college to make sure that all new hires are properly socialized and trained to perform well in the open-door college.

Summary

Community colleges have always had as their mission a task perceived by many as impossible! No institution of higher learning in history has ever attempted to take "all comers" and make some promise of quality and excellence as an outcome. Given the increased diversity and heterogeneity of our students and the likelihood that more and more such students will pursue postsecondary education in open-door settings, it is critical that we build better academic policies. These policies should and must assure quality as an outcome. We must become much more focused in our selection and hiring procedures to better attract those faculty and staff members who, in the best sense of the word, really believe in our mission and who possess the skills and attributes to help us truly "make good on the promise of the open door."

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